



I appreciate your letters, calls and e-mails on legislative issues. Please let me know if I can help on matters before state agencies.

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- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection
- Labor, Commerce, Research & Development

Senator

KAREN KEISER

33RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

SPRING 2005

Legislative Report

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Any time you begin a session of the Legislature facing a \$1.6 billion revenue shortfall, you know you are in for a rough ride. Who would have thought legislators could have gotten out of Olympia on time without raising general taxes and still be able to say that we balanced the budget and provided access to health care services for 38,000 more children?

Well, I am proud to say, we did just that – and a lot more. We took on some problems that we couldn't continue to ignore – like our sagging transportation infrastructure – and we made big investments in our schools, in the health of our children, and in the economy that will pay large dividends.

In addition, on a personal level, I was thrilled to serve this session as chair of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee, where we did good work, making prescription drugs more affordable and supporting an increase in health care coverage for children.

I hope you will find this newsletter informative and will share my enthusiasm for what I believe was a productive 2005 session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Keiser".

Karen Keiser
State Senator
33rd Legislative District



Health Care

Families across the state are concerned about escalating health care costs and whether they will continue to have good coverage they can afford. Even worse, more than 600,000 of our friends and neighbors have no insurance at all. That is why I was honored to serve as chair of the Senate Health & Long-term Care committee. We can make changes that improve people's lives. Here's a summary of our progress this session:

Improved Children's Access to Health Care

An additional 38,000 children will have access to health care services through the Medicaid program as a result of additional funding in the budget. We still have work to do, because about 60,000 children remain uninsured. Our legislation made it state policy that all children will have health insurance by 2010.

We also maintained enrollment in the Basic Health Plan at 100,000 enrollees.

Lowered the Cost of Prescription Drugs

We created a public-private consortium to purchase prescription drugs -- an expansion of an existing state effort to lower the cost of medicines that has already saved taxpayers more than \$15 million in less than two years. The new consortium will be open to private businesses and individuals who want to join. We also passed a bill to allow prescriptions from Canada to be re-imported upon approval from the federal government.

Expanded Access to Mental Health Services

Nearly 10 million children in this country suffer from a diagnosable mental illness, as do more than 45 million adults. But fewer than one in five children and only a third of adults with a mental illness receive professional treatment. House Bill 1154 offers a remedy. It establishes mental health parity by requiring insurers to provide mental health services on the same basis as other health care services. The new law applies to business with more than 50 employees.

In addition, we provided \$80 million for mental health services to the uninsured to make up for the loss of federal funds.

We also streamlined the delivery of those services, as well as those for



Cheryl Menard-Wentz, who attended the signing of the Asthma Education bill with Sen. Keiser and Gov. Gregoire, hopes Senate Bill 5841 will help other children avoid the tragic fate of her son. Tony, 11, died of an asthma related attack four years ago.

substance abuse, in a way that will translate into less crime, less homelessness and less of a burden on our child welfare systems.

Asthma addressed

Senate Bill 5841 tackled the growing epidemic of asthma among children. The new law directs the Dept. of Health and our schools to develop a uniform policy for training school staff about asthma. It also makes it clear that students should be able to self-administer treatment for asthma or anaphylaxis.

Paying for performance and better quality health care

We believe it makes sense to reward physicians and other health care providers who deliver high quality care, practice preventive medicine and help patients with chronic disease take better care of themselves. House Bill 1512 makes that a policy in state health care programs. Realizing that goal has great potential to save money and improve health care.

Created the Life Sciences Discovery Fund to generate 21st Century medical breakthroughs

Using \$350 million in bonus proceeds from the master tobacco settlement, the Legislature established

this fund to provide seed money to leverage private investment in cutting edge medical research and other technologies.

Cracked down on methamphetamines

This session we took another step to make it harder for "meth" makers to get the ingredients ("precursor drugs") they need to manufacture these illegal substances. The new law requires stores to put the cold medicines that contain these ingredients behind the counter. In addition, purchasers will be required to have a photo ID and will be restricted to purchasing no more than two packages a day.

Promoting stem cell research

The promise of stem cell research gives hope that one day we can find cures for diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes. A bill that would have set standards for this promising research in Washington failed to pass. We've not seen the last of this issue.

New health plan option for former military will save state taxpayers

Senate Bill 5391, which I sponsored, will reduce state expenditures by \$17.6 million while providing former military personnel who work for the state with a no-cost health care plan. It's a win-win for retired military and taxpayers.

Provided a boost to Benson Heights

This Kent facility, which provides critical services to mentally ill and other patients, will get a reimbursement boost so it can continue to provide assistance to uninsured people who need help.

Village at Angle Lake

The state's construction budget will provide \$400,000 to help establish a community clinic in SeaTac, making it home to the only medical provider in the city, as well a place to find child care and family counseling services.

Investing in Education

Every student deserves a high-quality education to help them succeed in school and in life. This session, using revenues from the 60-cent increase in the cigarette tax and partially restoring the estate tax, the Legislature made some significant improvements in our colleges and public schools:

- **Lowering class sizes in our public schools.** In keeping with the spirit of the voter approved initiative (I-728), we provided an additional \$138 million in funding to reduce

class size so students get the attention they deserve.

- **Ensuring recruitment and retention of good teachers.** Full funding of the voter-approved cost-of-living adjustments at a cost of \$139 million recognizes the value of teachers and the importance of keeping good ones.
- **Expanding enrollments at college.** A \$150 million boost in funding for the state's community colleges and universities will give an additional 7,900 students the opportunity to get a college education.

Bills that addressed other concerns of our community

Airport siting. For years, we have had the only major airport in the state in our backyard. Now, with the passage of SB 5121, we'll have a sound process for figuring out how to best meet the aviation needs of our state. The bill requires the state to follow a three-step process, which includes the creation of an Aviation Planning Council, which will make recommendations on where to locate future airports in the state. This will be good for the quality of life in our community, and good for the long-term economic growth of our state.

Unemployment Insurance. Taking advantage of \$100 million in federal Reed Act funds, the Legislature restored unemployment benefits that construction workers, farm workers and many others lost when reforms were enacted two years ago. This temporary change will put money back into the pockets of workers, too many of whom have struggled to put food on the table and make their mortgage and car payments. In addition, the law will actually reduce premiums for some hard hit industries, including agriculture and fishing.

Reducing exposure to arsenic and lead. House Bill 1605 created a state program to boost efforts to reduce children's exposure to contaminated soils, focusing particularly on schools and child care centers in the area affected by the Asarco smelter plume. My seatmate, Rep. Dave Upthegrove, did an outstanding job of getting this bill through.

Justice and Raiden Act. This new law is designed to avoid tragedies like the one that occurred last fall when 16-month old Justice Robinson and his 6-week old brother Raiden were found dead of malnutrition in their Kent apartment. The bill will save lives by giving case workers the ability to act earlier.

Good Samaritan bill. In the wake of the tragic death of Joey Levick, who was beaten and left to die along Highway 509, his mother pleaded with lawmakers to pass a law requiring citizens to make a simple 911 call when another person has been injured or assaulted. After several years of trying, finally, we won the day and this new law makes it a misdemeanor to fail to summon assistance in such cases.



Election Reforms Achieved

In the wake of the closest governor's race in the nation's history, where votes that should have been counted weren't, and votes that shouldn't have been counted were, it was clear we needed to take steps to ensure the integrity of the voting process. To that end, the Legislature passed an omnibus election reform bill (**Senate Bill 5499**) and several other bills. We will now have a statewide voting standard, and no more county by county confusion. In addition the bills:

- **Require voter identification.** All poll-site voters will have to show a photo ID, voter registration card, utility bill or government document.
- **Verify absentee ballot signatures.** The secretary of state will develop statewide signature verification standards for absentee ballots.
- **Create a voter database.** Beginning in January 2006, county auditors will have access to a centralized database of eligible voters so ballots associated with deceased people or convicted felons votes will not be counted.

I believe it is vital that we restore the trust of voters. The real hallmark of any democracy is an accurate, fair and free voting system, where all citizens participate.

Regional and local transportation projects



With funding from the \$8.5 billion, 16-year transportation plan, paid for with a 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax phased in over four years, the following regional and local projects got a boost:

- \$2 billion for the Alaskan Way Viaduct.
- \$992 million for Interstate 405, which includes the Highway 167 interchange south to S. 180th street.
- About \$50 million for Highway 509.
- About \$20 million for Highway 518 for airport access from the north.
- About \$20 million for HOV lanes on Highway 167.
- \$10 million for S. 272 Street-Interstate 5 interchange.
- \$6 million for the interchange at Highway 509 and 518.

Local projects

- The Highline School District's Airport Mitigation funding was maintained (\$7 million).
- Burien Town Square and the Segale Infrastructure Project at Southcenter. These economic development projects received \$2 million and \$6 million, respectively, in funding from the state.
- The Center for Advanced Manufacturing in Kent. This center, an effort to help the manufacturing sector move toward a more diversified, innovation-based economy, will receive \$215,000 in funding from the state.
- Funding to move the Japanese Garden in Burien was provided.
- The Angle Lake project of Lutheran Community Services in SeaTac received \$400,000. The rest of the \$7 million project has been raised through private and other public funds.
- Des Moines Beach Park historic buildings will receive \$300,000 in additional state funding.

Photo: Courtesy of the City of Des Moines



Nicole Vukonich, who attended Highline High School, was a page early in the session and was among the first to work in the newly refurbished Capitol building.

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